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HOW THE RITUALISTS HARM THE CHURCH.

BY THE RT. HON. ARTHUR J. BALFOUR.

It has ever been the boast of the Church of England that it is comprehensive. But a comprehensive Church means a Church which permits wide differences of opinion within its limits, and such differences can hardly exist without occasionally leading to internal dissensions.

It is to the antagonism between the High Church party and the Low that, in the past, dissensions have been chiefly due. The parties themselves date back, by an unbroken succession, to the Reformation controversies; and though, doubtless, each has undergone important modifications in the course of three centuries of development, yet their continuity remains; and, as in the time of Queen Elizabeth, they judge the ecclesiastical system, which both accept, by widely different theological standards. Where divergencies of this magnitude exist, the materials for inflammatory controversy are ready to hand. It must happen from time to time that the peculiar tenets of one school are, by a few of its members, exaggerated and pressed to their extreme consequences; and, when this occurs, suspicion and resentment are inevitably bred in the other. There then arises one of the "crises" which from time to time disturb the peace of the Church.

Through one of these "crises" we are passing at the present moment. A section (I believe a relatively small one) of the High Church clergy seem bent on proving their "catholicity," by imitating as much of Roman ritual, and absorbing as much of the Roman doctrine, as is compatible with remaining in a communion which the Church of Rome has declared to be schismatic. The results are what might have been anticipated by any one at all acquainted with the ecclesiastical history of Great Britain. Prot-

estant feeling is violently aroused. Religious controversy ceases for a time to be the concern chiefly of theologians; it overflows abundantly into the newspapers; it attains a rank growth on platforms and at mass meetings. Like everything else which deeply stirs the public mind, it finds its echo in Parliament; and, to the despair of those who know how difficult and delicate are the questions in dispute, it becomes the business of speakers whose religious sentiments may be above reproach, but who cannot in all cases be either learned historians or trained divines.

A speech, the substance of which the Editor of the *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* desires should be reproduced for those American readers who take an interest in the fortunes of the Anglican Church, was delivered (with a reluctance due to the reasons just noted) by the present writer in one of the debates which thus arose in the House of Commons. Its immediate occasion was a Memorial issued on the authority of a body drawn from a section of the High Church party, known as the English Church Union. This document, which does not seem by any means to represent the views of all who belong to the society which adopted it, gave, in my opinion, just offence to public opinion. It was all held to justify the accusation of "lawlessness" levied against the extreme ritualists. Its general tone was certainly not calculated to allay controversy; and some of its statements seem wholly inconsistent with loyalty to the Church of England. Under these circumstances a motion was brought forward in the House of Commons attacking the English Church Union by name, and deploring the spirit of "lawlessness" shown in its Memorial. To this an amendment was proposed, not differing in spirit from the original motion, but omitting all specific reference either to the English Church Union or to its Memorial. It was in support of this amendment that the speech was delivered.

I began by repeating what I have said on other occasions—namely, that the danger which the English Church is now incurring, and the divisions from which it is suffering, are not questions merely, or even principally, of technical obedience to the law; they are questions of loyalty to an institution. It is for this reason that I do not believe any effectual remedy can be found for our present troubles, by merely increasing the stringency of existing remedies against lawlessness. It is for this reason that I so deeply deplore the recent enunciation of policy by certain mem-

bers of the English Church Union. Of the many criticisms which have been passed upon this document, the one which is at once the most deserved and the most damaging is that it enunciates principles wholly inconsistent with loyalty to the Church of which its framers are members. I refrain from going beyond this statement. I do not say, for instance, that these gentlemen are guilty of what is commonly called Romanizing. I do not use that phrase, because I understand that they have themselves asserted that they do not agree with the defined doctrines of the Roman Church ; that they do not agree in all points with its discipline or ritual, and that they are not prepared to accept the principles of Papal supremacy. Therefore, I do not charge them with Romanizing ; but I do charge them with a desire so to alter, both in its forms and in its spirit, the traditional character of the Church to which they belong, as to make it practically unrecognizable by its most distinguished and most loyal sons for three centuries; and I hold that this desire, however honorable in its motives, however disinterested—and I believe it to be both honorable and disinterested—is not consistent with loyalty to the Church of England.

Now, I have often asked myself why it is that the great body of the High Church party, who are undoubtedly loyal to the Church, who undoubtedly have their legitimate place within its fold, have not frankly joined with other moderate sections in the Church, and openly dissociated themselves from the school of thought which I have ventured to indict in language perhaps strong, but certainly not stronger, in my judgment, than the facts of the case warrant. I believe the reason is that, in addition to their distinctive doctrines (on which I shall have more to say in a moment), the English Church Union have championed with great force two important doctrines from which I, at all events, do not dissent, and which, properly interpreted, I think are not only religious truths, but I had almost said religious truisms. One of these is that the members of the English Church belong not only to the English Church, but to the Church Universal; and the other is that the English Church, though it be an established Church, nevertheless has, and ought to have, a spiritual independence of its own. These are two principles which I do not believe are denied by any important section of opinion.

I have heard certain individuals described as Erastians, and there may be Erastians among us. But there is no school of Eras-

tianism among us. I believe there is no large body of educated opinion worth considering which does not recognize, as certainly I recognize, that for any religious community to regard itself as a mere Department of the State—a religious branch, as it were, of the Civil Service—is to abandon all hope of spiritual growth, and to expose itself, unprotected, to the most deadening of unspiritual influences. But, personally, I am quite ready to go further. I am one of those who have always desired to see greater spiritual autonomy given to the English Church. It may be that, being a Scotchman, living in Scotland, and seeing how the Established Church of Scotland is constituted, and how it works, I am prejudiced in favor of giving to the sister Established Church those liberties which the Scottish Established Church enjoys.

But, if there are grounds for desiring a reform of the Church of England, in the direction of giving greater autonomy to Convocation, and greater power to the laity, who are the obstacles to such a reform being pressed forward by all sections of Church opinion throughout the country, High, Low and Broad? They are the people who, like Lord Halifax, and those who follow Lord Halifax, make no secret of the fact that they regard the history of the Church of England for the last three centuries as an unprofitable parenthesis in the history of the Church Universal, and who frankly admit that they would like to see the ritual of the Church modified in a sense which would bring it, if not into absolute conformity, at any rate into very close agreement, with the ritual which existed in the Church of Rome in the immediate pre-Reformation days. I think I am not distorting the sense of the English Church Union declaration. If those paragraphs mean anything, they mean, in the first place, that the English Church has no tradition of its own worth consideration in the matter of ritual. In fact, that, I think, is stated in terms:

“A Church which, prescribing a service for Ascension Day, . . . has yet for long periods of time acquiesced in a general neglect of Ascension Day, has no continuous tradition or practice which can be appealed to as evidence of what it enjoins or forbids.”

That is their first proposition. Their second proposition is that, on *a priori* grounds, they are convinced that the priests who, at the time of the Reformation, became the first clergy of the Reformed Church of England, must have carried into the ritual of that Church the practices to which they had been accustomed,

while still in obedience to Rome. And their conclusion from these two allegations is, that unless a practice is specifically forbidden by the Prayer Book (they being the judges of that which is specifically forbidden), all these pre-Reformation practices are not merely permissible but praiseworthy, and that the Church has no corrective tradition to which appeal may legitimately be made in such a state of things. According to this theory, the clergy of the Church of England have a kind of roving commission to inquire into the ritual practices before the Reformation; and, unless any of these practices are specifically forbidden in terms which commend themselves as binding to their minds, they may introduce them into their services, however great may be the revolution in the immemorial usage of the Church of England effected thereby.

Now, a man may be a very honest and a very good man while holding these views, but he is not, in my judgment, a loyal member of the Church of England; and those who think, as I think, that some increased autonomy may well be given to the clergy and the laity of the Church of England, find, and must find, the main obstacle to the fulfillment of any such policy in the profound and not unjustifiable irritation which the theory I have just explained has produced, and is producing, in that great body of moderate opinion in this country, which, after all, desires to see the Church of England remain what it was in the days of Hooker, in the days of Butler, in the days of the great Evangelical movement associated with the name of Mr. Simeon, and of the great High Church movement associated with the names of Mr. Keble and Dr. Pusey. The men I have mentioned held widely different opinions. All were loyal members of the Church of England. For all of them, the ritual of that Church, as it has been practised from the days of Hooker to our own, has been sufficient; and I think that a good cause cannot be worse served than by allowing the questions of spiritual autonomy, and the fellowship of the Universal Church, to be, I will not say monopolized, but used as the flag of a party which desires evidently to transform, to revolutionize, and, I should say, to destroy the Church of which they are members. I do not profess, myself, to take a very confident, a very sanguine, view of the future of this controversy. I acknowledge that, the more I watch its progress, the more difficult it appears to me to steer the course of this controversy through all the rocks and shoals which surround it; but, if there be a hope—

and there is a hope—for the future of the Established Church of this country, it lies, and, in my opinion, can only lie, in the firm determination of all men who are sincerely loyal to the worship, the ritual, and the doctrines of the Church of England, to unite, even though there be important differences dividing them upon other subjects, in the resolve that, neither by one set of extremists nor by the other, shall this great Church be torn asunder.

There is one class of the community who make no show in the public papers, who do not appear on platforms, who neither publish letters nor make speeches, for whom I would venture to plead. After all, while we are disputing about ecclesiastical matters of relatively small importance, there are vast questions, lying at the very root of all religion, which are being called in doubt by men very far removed from the plane of this controversy. No greater injury can be done to the cause of religion than to compel these men to witness, from day to day, so many ministers of religion apparently absorbed in disputes which, compared with the subjects to which I have referred, are as nothing in the balance.

I grieve to think that there is not merely an injury, perhaps an irreparable injury, being done to the fabric of the Church of England, but that there is an injury being done to the whole cause of religion. That injury can only be mitigated, these dangers can only be met, by the resolve of men of all shades of moderate opinion to work together; and I would appeal to that great body of High Church opinion which I feel confident, does not sympathize with the extravagances and excesses of a small but active school, but which has hitherto stood timorously aloof, afraid lest by declaring themselves against the extreme Ritualists they should be imperilling doctrines to which, they attach the utmost value. I think this abstention most unfortunate. For their wishes never can have practical effect until they have convinced the great body of the laity of this country that by Church reform is not meant a wholesale revolution of Church ritual in the direction of Roman practices, and that the Church, on whose behalf they ask for a larger measure of autonomy, is in spirit, as well as in name, identical with that branch of the Universal Church which, for three hundred years and more, has been doing such magnificent service to the cause of religion in this country.

ARTHUR J. BALFOUR.